

Decisions, decisions

By Cliff Neill

As we journey through life there are times when we all encounter a crossroads: a time when some decision needs to be made that will probably be instrumental in shaping the rest of our lives and so is not to be taken lightly, especially if we are young enough to have most of our lives ahead of us.

People have used many methods in the past to find their way around the stress of making a decision for themselves. You've probably heard them all—let's draw straws, flip a coin, read our horoscope, weigh up the pros and cons, or seek wise counsel from older and more mature friends or close family members.

In 1914 Edward Thomas and Robert Frost, two poets who had met in Gloucestershire and had become firm friends, were sitting on an orchard stile close to Frost's home when word arrived that Britain had declared war on Germany. Edward was British but his friend Robert came from New Hampshire in the US. On that fateful day they discussed just what this war would do to their families.

Robert Frost opted to return to the United States and, as a result of this decision, Edward decided to join him with his family. They planned to live side by side in America: working, teaching, and farming. And so Robert returned to the safety of his home state thousands of miles from Europe and the violent war with all of its death and destruction.

Unfortunately, the decision for Edward wasn't so easy and he lingered on in England. His decision was whether to enlist and join the conflict or to go with his friend, as planned, to the safety of America. During this period of time Robert

Frost wrote "The Road Not Taken" and sent it to Edward.

This poem has been interpreted many ways over the years: is it about indecision, regret, joy, the delight that comes from going the way few others have chosen? Perhaps it's about all of these emotions, depending on our state of mind as we read it. What do you think? I also wonder just how Edward reacted to it. We'll never know. And also, I guess we will never know why he chose France, war, and death instead of peace and life in New Hampshire. Was he embarrassed not to, or was it the posters of Lord Kitchener pointing a finger with the caption: "Your country needs you!" Or, perhaps, he saw it as a chance to make a difference.

Whatever the reasons, and even though their friendship meant a

great deal to both of them, Edward Thomas chose to go to war. Sadly, he was killed in the first battle of Arras, Easter 1917. He had survived a little over two months in France!

When faced with decisions, there may be more than two options. It could be there are several paths we could take. A book that can help us is the Bible. It has some things to say about making decisions and urges us to be wise, to seek counsel from others who are more mature, and perhaps know quite a bit about the particular choice that we need to make. Maybe they had taken that same path themselves years before and know all about that journey's pitfalls and perhaps its blessings.

The writer of Proverbs puts it this way: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed".¹ Why seek counsel? Because the decisions we need to make during life's long journey are vitally important for us and our families, and, hopefully, they will lead us onwards to life and peace.

So let's all choose wisely.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

Both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.²

Notes

¹ Proverbs 15:22 (NIV).

² poemhunter.com/poem/the-road-not-taken/

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